



# Burning Issues

Fall 2015

## 2015 FIRE SEASON: A RECAP

The 2015 fire season limped out of the starting gates, with April and May seeing very modest wildland fire activity.

June started slowly as well, but the stage was set in Alaska, as that state was emerging from an unseasonably dry winter. When waves of lightning started to hit in late June, Alaska's fire season went into high gear quickly. (From June 20-23, an average of nearly 13,000 strikes were recorded statewide daily.)

By early July, hundreds of known fires were burning in Alaska. A massive mobilization of resources moved crews, supplies, incident management teams, and aircraft into Alaska. Smoke covered much of Alaska's interior, making aircraft operations a challenge. At times, the Yukon and Tanana rivers corridors were so smoky that supply barges could not navigate down river.

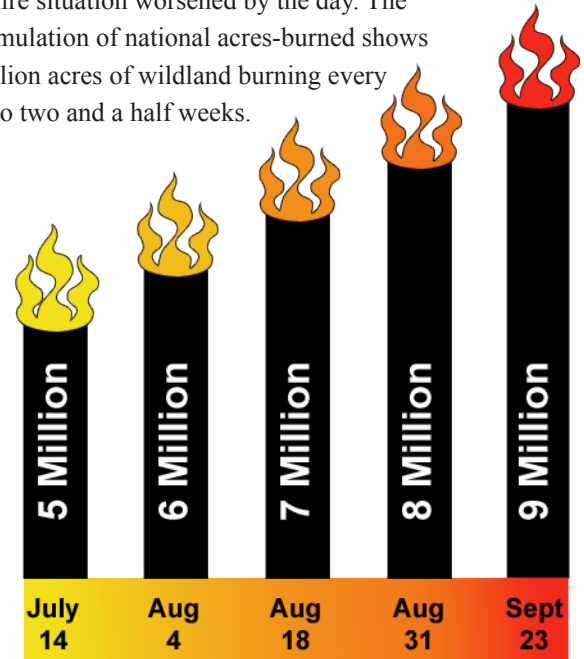
From late June to mid-July, fires raged across the interior of Alaska. By mid-July, the growth of Alaskan fires abated, thanks to precipitation, but Alaska ended up seeing 5.1 million acres burn in 2015.

By the middle of summer, drought-stricken conditions in northern CA, OR, WA and ID were starting to result in large fire activity. As in Alaska, lightning became the dominant ignition source. During late July and early August, repeated waves of lightning sparked fires in a flaming crescent from northern California all the way across the greater northwest into western Montana.



*A firefighter makes sure the fire is out around a Giant Sequoia tree during the Rough Fire on the Sierra National Forest.*

The fire situation worsened by the day. The accumulation of national acres-burned shows a million acres of wildland burning every two to two and a half weeks.



*By mid-July, five million acres burned in Alaska. From July to September, millions more acres burned in the West.*

The climb in the National Preparedness Level reflected the national fire situation. PL-3 was in place from late June to mid-July. The moderating conditions in Alaska triggered a drop to PL-2 on July 15, but by the end of the month, the national preparedness level was back to 3. On August 3rd, it was raised to 4. Ten days later, the NMAC raised the PL to 5. The preparedness level did not recede to 4 until September 6.

The 24 days we were at PL-5 this year is the longest period we have been at that level since 2007.

The one-two punch of heavy fire activity (first in Alaska, then in the greater northwestern US) pushed resource availability to the limits this summer. By early July, Type 1 crews, aircraft, incident management teams and smokejumpers were heavily committed.

NICC reached out to Canada for help several times during the 2015 fire season. Canada ultimately provided one scooper group, two airtanker groups, five hand crews and 58 mid-level fireline and aviation managers. The fireline

## 2015 FIRE SEASON

*Continued from page 1*

and aviation managers were assigned to incidents in the Northern Rockies geographic area.

On August 14, NIFC sent a request for assistance to the Department of Defense, asking for 200 troops to be trained and deployed as wildland firefighters. The troops were mobilized from Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, WA, and deployed to fires in Eastern Washington (the Tower and Marble Creek fires).

Around the same time, NIFC requested 68 mid-level fireline and aircraft managers from Australia and New Zealand. The Australian/New Zealand contingent arrived in Boise on August 23 and after orientation and training were assigned to fires in Washington and Oregon.

Drone incursions over or near active wildfires became a serious issue this year. By mid-September, 19 incursions had been reported. Forty-seven percent of these incursions forced the shut-down, delay or evasion of aircraft over fires. The number of states reporting drone incursions doubled in 2015 over 2014 reports.

The 2015 fire season has been expensive in several ways. Federal spending on fire suppression may approach \$2,000,000,000 this year.

The cost in human lives has been high as well. Thirteen fire personnel have lost their lives this year in the line of duty.

Wildfire again had a significant impact on SG habitat this summer. According to Fire Planning estimates, some 533,000 acres of SG habitat were burned this year. Perhaps the single most damaging incident was the Soda Fire, which burned almost 284,000 acres in SW Idaho (and SE Oregon) during the second week of August.

## CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS MONTH

We now live in a world that is more connected than ever before. The Internet touches almost all aspects of everyone's daily life, whether we realize it or not. We connect with friends and family, conduct business and banking online and rely on many services, like transportation and electricity, that are supported with online systems. Technology has spearheaded advancements in health care, education, business, music, government, and many other industries. As technology advances, our lives become easier and more connected. However, being constantly connected brings increased risk of theft, fraud, and abuse. No country, industry, community, or individual is immune to cyber risks. As a nation, we face constant cyber threats against our critical infrastructure and economy. As individuals, cybersecurity risks can threaten our finances, identity, and privacy. Since our way of life depends on critical infrastructure and the digital technology that operates it, cybersecurity is one of our country's most important national security priorities, and we each have a role to play—cybersecurity is a shared responsibility.

Recognizing the importance of cybersecurity to our nation, President Obama designated October as National Cyber Security Awareness Month. National Cyber Security Awareness Month is designed to engage and educate public and private sector partners through events and initiatives with the goal of raising awareness about cybersecurity and increasing the resiliency of the nation in the event of a cyber incident. National Cyber Security Awareness Month takes place each October and is sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security in cooperation with the National Cyber Security Alliance and the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center.

### Cyber Security and You

Follow these simple steps to keep yourself, your assets, and your personal information safe online.

- Set strong passwords and don't share them with anyone.
- Keep your operating system, browser, and other critical software optimized by installing updates.
- Maintain an open dialogue with your family, friends, and community about Internet safety.
- Limit the amount of personal information you post online and use privacy settings to avoid sharing information widely.
- Be cautious about what you receive or read online—if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.



## LET'S GET TO KNOW NIFC SECURITY

We see them every day—the NIFC Security staff. But who are these service-minded individuals? In this issue of the NIFC newsletter, we are profiling four members of the security staff. We hope to profile other security team members in the next edition.

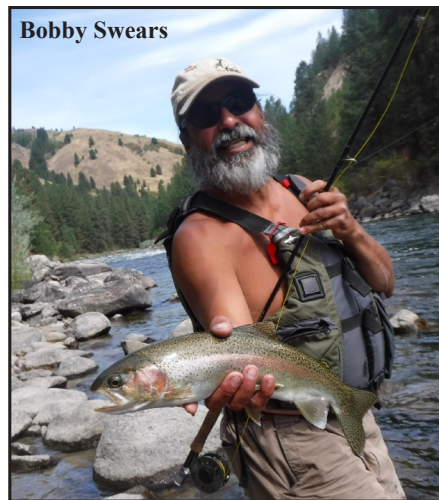
Bobby Swears is an Idaho native, originally from a rural community on the Payette River. He was a seasonal firefighter for 10 years at the Lower Snake River District helitack crew. Bobby worked his way up to assistant foreman position, and briefly served as the acting crew foreman at one point. He has worked in NIFC Security for the past decade. In his off time, Bob enjoys fishing Idaho's rivers and streams, plus snow sports.

Jeffrey Lake was born in Long Beach, California, into a USAF family. His growing up years were spent in Japan, Germany, Colorado, New Mexico, Florida, and California. Jeff graduated from high school in Panama City, FL and joined the Air Force, where he pursued a career in Law Enforcement, Security and Air Base Defense. His career took him to many parts of the world. After moving to Boise in the late 1970s, Jeff transitioned into a career in social work. He earned a degree in Social Work at Boise State University, and was the deputy director of a local non-profit community housing and assistance agency for 18 years. In that role, he helped develop community assistance programs – homeless housing, Paint the Town, Rake Up Boise, etc. Jeff joined the NIFC Security unit in November 2002. He has managed the NIFC Access Control Office (Key Shop) since 2006. He enjoys the Idaho outdoors (especially spring, summer, fall activities) including camping and gardening. He also takes part in community events and the local music scene. Jeff is a member of the Boise Blues Society.

Blaine Dawson joined the NIFC Security team in August 2012. Prior to NIFC, he worked for 7 years at Mountain Home AFB and Gowen Field AFB as a Security Forces Member. Blaine is originally from Boise but moved to San Antonio, TX when he was 11. He moved back to Boise when I was 19 and has lived here ever since. He like long walks on the beach and sunsets.

Walter Miller is originally from the San Francisco Bay area and found his way to Idaho via the U.S. Air Force. Walt served in the Air Force for 26 years, working mainly as an aerospace ground technician. "I worked on all kinds of equipment necessary to support aircraft," he said. "What kind of equipment?" he was asked by the curious reporter. "All kinds of equipment," he answered meaningfully. (In other words, don't ask so many questions.) Walt retired from the Air Force in 2006 and joined the security force at Mountain Home Air Force Base, serving there for five years. He has been with NIFC Security for two years. In his spare time, Walt likes to work out and keep his body fit and healthy.

Bobby Swears



Jeff Lake



Blaine Dawson



Walter Miller





## NPS EMPLOYEES MOTIVATED BY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

“Have a mentor, be a mentor.” This statement is a quote from Sharon Allen, former Executive Chairman of Deloitte LLP. Over the course of the three-day 2015 Andrus Center Conference on Women and Leadership, speakers reiterated this message many times.

This was the third annual Conference on Women and Leadership. It took place at Boise State University in Boise, Idaho during the first full week in September. The 2015 conference focused on education, motivation, and inspiration. Approximately 700 people attended including a group from the National Park Service (NPS) Division of Fire and Aviation (DFAM) in Boise, Idaho and three NPS-sponsored scholarship recipients, Mary Jane Derendoff and Jessica Sherwood from the Alaska Region, and Diane Abendroth from Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

The conference opened with remarks from Cecil Andrus, four-term Idaho

Governor and former U.S. Secretary of the Interior; Rear Admiral (ret) Ronne Froman, “Navy Mayor of San Diego;” and the facilitator, Tracy Andrus—President of the Andrus Center. The speakers are too numerous to list, but some of the highlights included Michele Andrasik, PhD—Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Lt. Colonel Merryl Tengesdal—First Female African American U-2 Pilot, Mary Wagner—Associate Chief U.S. Forest Service, and Cherie Buckner-Webb—Idaho Senator, District 19. The speakers shared stories of their personal journeys and all of the speakers emphasized that you cannot be successful on your own, as well as the importance of both having a mentor and being a mentor. Mary Wagner stated, “The best players are still coached. The best leaders are still coached.”

The attendees from NPS DFAM came away motivated and inspired and have planned an After Action Review

(AAR) to discuss how to apply what they learned. Betsy Haynes, on detail to the NPS Fire Communication and Education Program within DFAM, stated, “The conference provided me with a sense of empowerment in my own personal career growth. I plan to continue conversations with a group of the women who attended the conference to discuss how we can improve women’s leadership in the federal service.”

The fourth annual conference is scheduled for September 14-16, 2016 in Boise, Idaho. Our hope is that NPS will be well represented at the 2016 conference. To learn more about this year’s conference and speakers, visit <http://sspa.boisestate.edu/andruscenter/events/andrus-conference/>. The Andrus Center for Public Policy shared posts on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/andruscenter> and tweets were marked with the hashtag #womenlead2015.



*NPS Representatives with Cecil Andrus at the 2015 Women and Leadership Conference. Photo by Susan Lamberson.*

## NEW BIA FIRE BUDGET ANALYST AT NIFC

Cedric DeCory hails from the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in Rosebud, South Dakota and is an enrolled member of the “Sicangulakota”.

Cedric and his family have lived in Boise since 1992, after he separated from the U.S. Air Force in Mountain Home, ID. For the past 18 years, he has worked with the United States Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Boise, ID, most recently as an Administrative Officer in Mental Health. Prior to the VA, he worked in various health care related offices, as well as a structural firefighter and EMT at the Eagle (ID) Fire Department.

During Cedric’s service at the VA, he worked on multiple national programs and initiatives to improve health care options and outcomes for American Indian/Alaska Native veterans and their families. He has chaired and sat on several committees to develop guidelines and policies that focus on cultural competencies and sensitivity training. He has also developed and managed programs that

educate on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Native American Veterans.

Cedric has a Bachelor’s degree in Social and Behavioral Science from George Fox

University and taken business management and social work courses at Nebraska Western College and Boise State University.

In his spare time Cedric enjoys spending time with his five boys fishing, camping and attending PowWows and ceremonies in the Northwest and Central Plains areas.

Cedric can be reached at his office in the Sho-Pai building at 387.5946 or at [Cedric.Decory@bia.gov](mailto:Cedric.Decory@bia.gov).



## INVASION OF SAGEBRUSH AT THE LUCKY PEAK NURSERY

The Lucky Peak Nursery packed more than 400,000 sagebrush seedlings grown onsite to deliver to a burned area in the BLM Twin Falls District.

The order for the sagebrush seedlings was received in January 2015. The Twin Falls District staff collected the seeds (an average of 2,000,000 seeds per pound) and sent them to Lucky Peak Nursery where they were cleaned and placed into cold storage until May. At that time, the tiny sagebrush seeds were sown in the greenhouse. They germinated quickly and grew from May until October with regular irrigation, fertilization, and support from the Lucky Peak Nursery staff.

On October 19, a contract crew began planting the sagebrush seedlings in the Grassy Hills, Shoshone Basin and Clear Creek areas of the Twin Falls District, areas that have burned in previous years. The 12-person planting crew can plant the seedlings in about 20 days.

This fall, government agencies throughout the West will begin ordering seedlings to plant on this year’s fires.

This year, the nursery has received sowing requests for over 2.8 million sagebrush seedlings for BLM field offices in California, Idaho, Nevada and Oregon.





## NIFC BUILDS FIREFIGHTER-CROWS FOR LOCAL FALL FESTIVITIES

Last fall, returning from a hike in the foothills, Kathy Komatz noticed scarecrows scattered around the Idaho Botanical Gardens in east Boise. After some research, she found that this was a fall event that the Garden holds annually. She thought it would be neat for NIFC to submit some scarecrows next year, in the form of firefighters, for the annual garden festivities. Each year a different theme is set, and this year happened to be “Heroes”; very fitting for just coming off an extremely busy fire season!

With the help of Laura Barrett and Flap Estey, materials were gathered and firefighter clothes were stuffed. The final product resulted in a heli-rappeller, a smokejumper and a standard firefighter, with pumpkin heads and corn stalk limbs, propped up proudly with educational signs made by External Affairs. “I did it as a tribute to the hard work of

the 2015 firefighters and to honor the fallen,” says Komatz. Other businesses, organizations, non-profits, community organizations and local families have created unique scarecrows which may be found throughout the Garden grounds as well.

Kathy would like to thank Dan Buckley, Seth Weber and Ivan Smith for gear donations as well as Laura and Flap, for their time in putting together all the pieces together! The firefighter crows were supported and sponsored by NIFC and NPS Employee Associations.

The event lasts through October 31, so you can still more information online here <http://idahobotanicalgarden.org/> or vote for your favorite “fire-crow” in person at the event!



### Some Stats...

#### 52,505 Fires

While that is a substantial number, that is about 8,000 fires below the 10-year average (60,586 fires).

#### 9.3 Acres Burned

2015 has been one of only four years since 1960 to see more than 9 million acres burn, but still it's short of the 9.8 million acres burned in 2006. In addition to this, 5.1 million of the total acres burned thus far have burned in Alaska.

#### 32,00 Personnel

This statistic is hard to assess against historical levels due to record keeping methods, but it's likely this level has not been seen before. At the peak of the 2015 fire season (Aug. 24), there were 130 international firefighters from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada and some 200 Army troops on the ground working on wildland fires.

